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Speaker Naize addresses Navajo leaders and healthcare officials at the Navajo Nation Affordable Care Act Summit

LEUPP, Ariz. - On Thursday, Speaker Johnny Naize (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood) stood before a crowd of approximately 150 people to welcome them to the Navajo Nation Affordable Care Act Summit at the Twin Arrows Navajo Casino Resort.

The summit provided an opportunity for Navajo Nation Council Delegates, chapter officials, and health care leadership from Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah to discuss how the Affordable Care Act of 2010 will impact the Navajo People, healthcare facilities, and businesses.

"This room is filled with leaders in the Navajo health care system. I am happy to see that we have all come together to learn about the federal changes that will affect the health of our Navajo people," said Speaker Naize.

The Affordable Care Act was signed into law by President Obama in Mar. 2010, aiming to provide affordable health care coverage for 32 million people over the next ten years, with implementation scheduled to begin on Oct. 1.

"The Affordable Care Act will affect each of us. It is important that leaders from the chapter level to those in the hospitals and clinics have a good understanding of this new complex system," said Speaker Naize.

Along with the signing of the ACA, President Obama also permanently reauthorized the Indian Health Care Improvement Act, which provides services through the Indian Health Service, tribal organizations, and urban Indian health programs.

The ACA will provide for the establishment of an Office of Direct Service Tribes, recognition of tribal epidemiology centers as public health authorities, protection of IHS National Healthcare Facility Construction Priority System including five Navajo projects, and a mandate for a Navajo Medicaid Feasibility Study.

"The Navajo Nation covers three states. That is three healthcare systems our Nation must constantly remain updated and a part of," said Speaker Naize.

The ACA gives states the option to participate in a health insurance exchange and Medicaid expansion.

Health insurance exchanges will vary by state and allows individuals to shop for health insurance similar to shopping for an airline ticket, choosing the right business, price, and benefits.

The Medicaid expansion allows for states to expand Medicaid coverage to adults ages 19 to 65 with an income up to \$14,856 per person.

Currently, Arizona has declined to participate in a state-health insurance exchange, opting instead for the Medicaid expansion, New Mexico has opted into both the health-insurance exchange and the Medicaid expansion, and Utah has chosen to continue its own health-insurance exchange and remains undecided about the Medicaid expansion.

On Jan. 1, 2014, the ACA mandates that each U.S. citizen be enrolled in a qualified health plan, except for American Indians and Alaska Natives who will be exempt.

"We tell our children to get an education, help improve our Nation, and learn our language and culture, but in order for them to do that we must provide them with a healthy future," said Speaker Naize.

The Navajo Nation Affordable Care Act Summit was sponsored by the Navajo Nation Division of Health.

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